BRITISH COLUMBIA

BC STATS

Service BC
Ministry of Management Services

Infoline

Contact: bcstats.infoline@gov.bc.ca

Issue: 05-14

April 8, 2005

- **BC's unemployment rate drops to 6.5% in March**
- **Housing starts rise 10.7% in March; building permits up 21.7%**
- **British Columbians spent an average $542 on prescription and over-the counter drugs in 2004**

Labour Force

- **British Columbia's unemployment rate slipped back to 6.5% (*seasonally adjusted*) in March, reversing an upturn that occurred in February.** Last month's decline brought BC's jobless rate back below the Canadian level, where it has remained in all but one of the last seven months–the first period of consistently below-average unemployment rates for BC since 1997. However, the improvement in the unemployment rate does not necessarily indicate a stronger labour market: employment inched up just 0.1% between February and March, while the labour force shrank 0.4%.

  Canada's unemployment rate slipped 0.1 percentage point, dropping to 6.9% in March. Nationally, job growth stalled (0.0%) while the labour force shrank slightly (-0.1%). Unemployment rates in the rest of Canada ranged from 3.5% in Alberta to 14.9% in Newfoundland, where jobless rates in recent months have fallen to levels not seen since the late 1980s. BC, Alberta (-0.7 percentage points), Nova Scotia (-1.2 points) and Newfoundland (-0.3 points) were the only provinces where the unemployment rate fell in March. *Data Source: Statistics Canada*

- **Employment in the province's goods (-2.0%) and service (+0.6%) sectors moved in opposite directions in March.** The decline in the goods sector was largely due to job losses in manufacturing (-3.5%) and forestry, fishing & mining (-4.5%). Most service industries took on more workers. Employment in finance, insurance and real estate jumped 5.0%, while job growth in wholesale and retail trade (+1.6%) was also strong. Together, these industries provided 11,900 net new jobs in the province. However, these gains were offset by similarly large losses (totalling 10,400 jobs) in the health care (-1.7%) and information, cultural & recreation services (-6.4%) industries.

  Employers hired more part-time (+1.0%) workers, but there were fewer people with full-time (-0.2%) jobs. The number of private sector (+0.9%) and self-employed (+1.7%) workers rose, while public sector employment declined (-4.7%). The youth unemployment rate (aged 15-24) fell to 12.1% in March.

  Data Source: Statistics Canada

- **Within the province, jobless rates ranged from 5.0% (*3-month moving average*) in Northeast to 11.5% in North Coast/Nechako, the only region with a double-digit unemployment rate.** Victoria's unemployment rate (5.5%) remained well below the provincial average. In Vancouver, the rate was 6.6%. *Data Source: Statistics Canada*

The Economy

- **The number of housing starts in the province continued to climb in March, rising 10.7% (*seasonally adjusted*) on the heels of a 12.5% gain in February.** Nationally, starts were flat (+0.3%) in March. New housing starts continued to climb in BC, Alberta (+7.5%), Manitoba (+29.3%) and New Brunswick (+36.0%), but activity slowed in other parts of the country. Ontario (-2.0%) and Quebec (-6.9%) both contributed to the overall weakness.

  Data Source: CMHC

- **The value of building permits issued by BC municipalities jumped 21.7% (*seasonally adjusted*) in February, following a flat January (+0.7%).** This was the first substantial month-over-month increase since November 2004. Residential permits remained robust, rising 16.9% to $546.4 million. Planned spending on non-residential projects was up 34.0% (to $247.7 million), boosted by a substantial increase (+76.6%) in permits for commercial projects.

  The total value of planned construction projects in the Victoria area rose a whopping 136.3% in

Report European immigrants to BC

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February. Abbotsford (+46.1%) and Vancouver (+5.1%) posted slower gains.

Nationally, the value of building permits hit its third highest level on record in February, up 13.5% to $5.06 billion. BC (+21.7%) and Ontario (+19.0%), together with PEI (+93.4%) and New Brunswick (+21.5%) posted the strongest gains.

Source: Statistics Canada

- **Sawmills and planing mills in the province increased their production 15.6% this January, compared to the same month last year.** Both coastal (+4.0%) and interior (+17.6%) mills were busier than in January 2004. Nationally, production of lumber and ties was up 8.9%.

Data Source: SC, Catalogue 35-003-XIB

Port Activity

- **Vancouver remains the busiest port in Canada, handling about 15% of the cargo that entered or left Canada by ship in 2003.** Come-By-Chance, Newfoundland is the second-busiest port, with 10% of all cargo. Besides Vancouver, three other BC ports are in the top-20 list: Fraser River (3% of the total tonnage in 2003), Howe Sound (2%) and North Arm Fraser River (1%).

Cargo movement at the Port of Vancouver rebounded in 2003, expanding 7.6% to 67.9 million tonnes as shipments of grains, coal and potash through the port rose sharply. Vancouver also handled a record number of containers, accounting for about 46% of all container traffic in Canada. According to the Port of Vancouver, the total volume of marine cargo increased even more (+10%) in 2004, rising to 73.6 million tonnes. Almost all (97% in 2003) of Vancouver's marine cargo is international, so the port benefits when international trade between Canada and other countries is thriving.

Fraser River, which is becoming a destination point for overseas cargo, handled 9.0% more tonnes of cargo in 2003 than in the previous year, much of it in containers.

Nationally, Canadian ports moved a record 443.0 million tonnes of cargo in 2003, up 8.5% from the previous record of 408.1 million in 2002. Domestic cargo, which increased 8.7% to 136.4 million tonnes, also reached its highest level since 1988. Domestic cargo is counted twice–when it is loaded and again when it is unloaded. *Data Source: Statistics Canada & Port Vancouver*

Agriculture

- **Canadian beef cattle and feedlot operators, who were hard-hit by a ban on beef trade following the announcement of a single case of mad cow disease in May 2003, received a return of just 3.9 cents on the dollar in 2003, less than half the average return in the previous year.** Hog and pig farming (4.9 cents) was not particularly profitable either. However, operating margins for producers of dairy & milk products (22.9%) and grains & oilseeds (19.1%) remained healthy in 2003. Overall, total operating revenues increased 2.5% in 2003 (to an average of $207,689), while expenses jumped 5.6% (to $182,122). The average net income from farming was $25,567. *Data Source: Statistics Canada*

Drugs

- **In 2004, British Columbians spent an estimated $542 per capita on prescription and over-the-counter drugs.** Average spending on prescription drugs was $421 per capita, with another $121 spent on non-prescribed drugs. Public sector plans picked up the tab for about 38% of total drug expenditures, with the remaining 62% paid for privately. Average health expenditures (public and private sector) were $3,970 per capita in 2004. Drugs accounted for an estimated 13.7% of this total, but comprised 30.2% of private sector spending on health care.

British Columbians spend less on drugs, both prescription and over-the-counter, than residents of any other province. In the rest of Canada, spending ranges from $615 per person in Saskatchewan to $732 in Ontario. Quebec is the province where drug costs (both private and public) account for the biggest share (19.6%) of total health expenditures; in BC, they make up 13.7%, less than in any other province.

Data Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information

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Infoline Report

Issue: 05-14
April 08, 2005

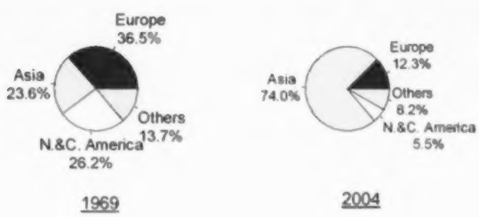
Contact: Frank Ip (250) 387-0336
Originally published in *Immigration Highlights*, Issue 04-4. Annual Subscription $30 +GST

European Immigrants to British Columbia

Over the last two decades, more than 86,000 European immigrants settled in British Columbia.

One of the most obvious changes in the mosaic of B.C. immigration is the shift in the source of immigrants from European to Asian countries over the last three decades. Since 1972, Asia has replaced Europe as the leading source of immigrants to British Columbia. Europe has since remained as the second top source of immigrants to the province. Over the last twenty years, the proportion of B.C. immigrants who came from Europe has shrunk from 18 per cent in 1985 to 12 per cent in 2004

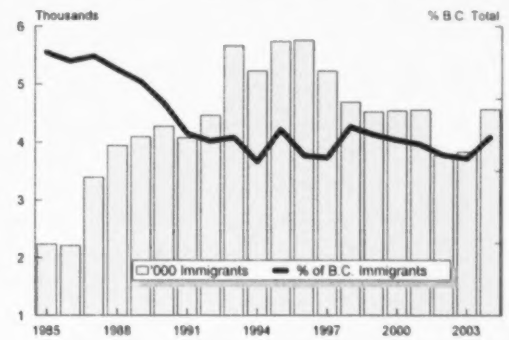
B.C. Immigrants by Source



However, the actual number of European immigrants who arrived in the province during this period has been relatively stable. In fact, the number of European immigrants to B.C was around two thousand in the earlier 1980's and increased steadily through the early 1990's to around four to five thousand. The shrinking proportion in European immigrants was primarily due to the fact that B.C. immigration had been increasing and that the number of Asian immigrants who arrived in the province had increased drastically. The proportion of Asian immigrants in total B.C. landings rose from 58 per cent in 1985 to a peak of 80 per cent in 1996 and has remained relatively steady at around 75 per cent since.

The distribution of European immigrants by class has been very similar to that of the overall landings in B.C. The majority were Independent Skilled Worker and Family immigrants. Over the twenty-year period from 1985 to 2004, 54 per cent of Europe immigrants were in the skilled worker classes and 42 per cent in the family classes. Business and refugee immigrants represented 12 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively.

European Immigrants to British Columbia

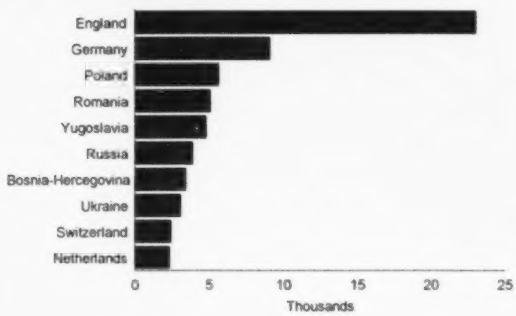


Relative to the rest of Canada, B.C. tends to receive a smaller proportion of European immigrants coming to the country. During 1985 to 2004, B.C. received a total of 17 per cent of all immigrants to Canada while only attracting 11 per cent of all European immigrants. Ontario and Quebec received 55 per cent and 20 per cent respectively, of all European immigrants during that period.

England, followed by Germany, have always been the two most prominent sources of European immigrants to B.C. although the province has experienced a growing inflow of Eastern European immigrants over the last decade.

B.C. Top 10 European Immigrant Sources

Landed 1985 to 2004



BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Release: April 2005

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Infoline

April 8, 2005

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BC at a glance . . .

POPULATION (thousands)		% change on
	Jan 1/05	one year ago
BC	4,220.0	1.1
Canada	32,078.8	0.9
GDP and INCOME		% change on
(BC - at market prices)	2003	one year ago
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) *($ millions)*	145,550	5.2
GDP *($ 1997 millions)*	133,600	2.5
GDP *($ 1997 per Capita)*	32,175	1.6
Personal Disposable Income *($ 1997 per Capita)*	19,758	0.3
TRADE ($ millions, seasonally adjusted)		% change on prev. month
Manufacturing Shipments - Jan	3,586	0.1
Merchandise Exports - Jan	2,631	3.0
Retail Sales - Jan	3,987	-0.9
CONSUMER PRICE INDEX		12-month avg
(all items - 1992=100)	Feb '05	% change
BC	123.8	2.1
Canada	125.8	2.0
LABOUR FORCE (thousands)		% change on
(seasonally adjusted)	Mar '05	prev. month
Labour Force - BC	2,248	-0.4
Employed - BC	2,101	0.1
Unemployed - BC	147	-7.0
		Feb '05
Unemployment Rate - BC *(percent)*	6.5	7.0
Unemployment Rate - Canada *(percent)*	6.9	7.0
INTEREST RATES (percent)	April 6/05	April 7/04
Prime Business Rate	4.25	4.00
Conventional Mortgages - 1 year	5.05	4.45
- 5 year	6.25	5.95
US/CANADA EXCHANGE RATE	April 6/05	April 7/04
(avg. noon spot rate) Cdn $	1.2219	1.3130
US $ *(reciprocal of the closing rate)*	0.8191	0.7636
AVERAGE WEEKLY WAGE RATE		% change on
(industrial aggregate - dollars)	Mar '05	one year ago
BC	698.01	3.0
Canada	695.39	2.6

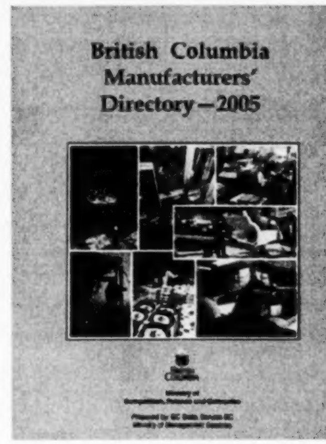
SOURCES:

Population, Gross Domestic Product, Trade, Prices, Labour Force, Wage Rate } Statistics Canada

Interest Rates, Exchange Rates: Bank of Canada Weekly Financial Statistics

For latest Weekly Financial Statistics see www.bankofcanada.ca

2005 Manufacturers' Directory



600 pages

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